

Awareness raising in schools

Two projects that aim to increase schoolchildren's awareness and knowledge about dementia are featured here. On this page **Dr Ejaz Nazir** and colleagues describe the work of the DARE Project in Shropshire schools, then (opposite) **Rebecca Rylance** and **Jill Pendleton** describe how the Innovate Dementia team works with secondary school pupils in Liverpool

As dementia becomes more widespread, so the urgency of changing public perceptions of the condition grows. It is still plagued by stigma and there remains a common misconception that nothing can be done to help people live well with dementia.

Our answer, as a memory service medical team, has been to take a more enlightened set of messages out to local schools. More public awareness of the truth about dementia was one of the three main aims of the National Dementia Strategy and it seemed to us as health care professionals that we were in a good position to do something about it.

Carers can, of course, find looking after people with dementia not only rewarding but stressful at times. They need information not only on the disease itself but the support they can receive. By getting involved in creating awareness and dispelling myths – not least when the audiences are young and ready to learn – practitioners can help ensure people receive timely support.

Although our role is to assess and diagnose dementia in individuals over the age of 65 in part of Shropshire, we felt that it was important to do our awareness-raising at the other end of the age spectrum. Not only can educating a young audience about dementia help to remove stigma before it develops, but children are the future generation of carers for people with dementia.

The DARE project

Our project was titled the Dementia Awareness-Raising and Education (DARE) project. It was led by Dr Ejaz Nazir, consultant old age psychiatrist,

who prepared a toolkit based on the aim to teach children about various aspects of dementia as well as the needs of people with dementia and their carers. The teaching sessions were undertaken by the four members of our team – Dr Nazir, two junior doctors and a senior nurse. The learning resources were adapted according to the age of the students.

Three schools were targeted in Telford and Wrekin: 100 primary and secondary school children from Blessed Robert Johnson School, 60 secondary school children from Newport High School and 40 secondary school children from Adams' Grammar School took part in the project. They were divided into groups of 10. Over a period of a year (June 2011-June 2012) each group participated in five separate sessions of an hour each.

We wanted to give students a good overview of the subject. We presented material accessibly on Powerpoint to teach them about various aspects of dementia including its causes and symptoms before detailing the emotional and physical problems that people with dementia and their carers can face. We talked about the services that they are entitled to receive such as assistance with day-to-day caring and access to respite care.

To help the children engage with the topic we brought along a demonstration model of the human brain, highlighting the areas involved in dementia, and discussed two case studies. Once we had outlined the basics we moved on to a teaching session on the diagnosis and management of dementia. The students were taught about the "standardised mini-mental state examination" (SMMSE), a memory test that helps to diagnose dementia and assess

its progression, and we got them involved in role plays as an enjoyable way to familiarise them with it. Finally, we gave the pupils a 10-question quiz, followed by a discussion of the answers.

We asked for feedback from both students and teachers so that we could gauge the effectiveness of our awareness-raising (see box below). The tenor of their responses was generally positive – out of 150

students, 135 of them agreed with the statement "I have found the DARE project helpful," and all three teachers agreed with it. Judging by their responses students had gained an understanding of the condition and what it means for people with dementia and their carers. At the same time, the classes had clearly assuaged some of their fears.

For his work on the DARE project Dr Nazir was named

Feedback from the students included:

- The brain model helped me to understand how dementia affects the mind.
- I liked taking part in the role play and pretending to be someone who suffers from dementia.
- I think I now will be able to spot signs of dementia in my family members.
- It would have been good to learn about research being done for dementia.
- I would like to try the SMMSE on anyone who might be having signs of dementia.
- Learning about famous people with dementia would have been interesting.
- I used to think that people having dementia were a bit scary. Now I realize that they should be treated like normal people.
- Thanks for making dementia easy to understand.
- I had no idea how hard it must be to be a carer.
- I didn't know that people with dementia and their carers go through so much. It's good that they can get lots of help.
- I told my family what I had learnt. Now they know about dementia.
- What I've learnt will help me to become a good carer when I grow up.

Feedback from teachers included:

- Students engaged well in the activities.
- Perhaps some more detail could have been given on how to arrange for the transfer of a person suffering from dementia to a nursing home.
- The opportunity for our pupils to receive education on dementia has been much appreciated.
- Not only the pupils but the teachers have been educated by your team. For this we are grateful.
- The students enjoyed the role plays concerning the use of the SMMSE. Participating in role plays concerning other aspects of dementia would have been useful.
- I had rather limited knowledge on the subject. Thanks for telling us so much about it.

Feedback forms were completed by students and teachers after they had undergone the five sessions. Forms were returned by three teachers and 150 children.

Creating a dementia friendly generation

Rebecca Rylance & Jill Pendleton describe the awareness-raising work of the Innovate Dementia team

Schools can play a pivotal role in the development of dementia-friendly communities. By educating children and young people about dementia, it is possible to create a dementia-friendly generation – one that is more aware of dementia and more supportive of people who live with dementia.

The Alzheimer's Society (2013) also believes that educating young people is a fundamental part of creating dementia-friendly communities. It is becoming more and more likely that young people will come into contact with someone living with dementia. Furthermore, as the Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) points out (2013), the young people of today are the employers and employees of tomorrow and may take on caring responsibilities at some point in their lives.

In response to this, Innovate Dementia – a three year transnational European-funded project between Liverpool John Moores University and Mersey Care NHS Trust, with partners from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands – developed an



Tommy Dunne with students in a training session

intergenerational educational package for children and young people children in Liverpool.

The Innovate Dementia team went to a number of secondary high schools throughout the city to deliver dementia awareness training to sixth-form children (year 12). Although each school had differing requirements in terms of their existing timetable and curriculum demands, the team was able to visit each school to do the training as part of the school's non-statutory PHSE aspect of the national curriculum.

The team was joined by Tommy Dunne, who has

dementia and lives well with it, and the training broadly followed the components of the 'Dementia for Schools' curriculum: understanding dementia; learning about carers; meeting someone with dementia; and assistive technology. Sessions were planned with the teaching staff from each school so that they were well matched to the learning needs and learning styles of the pupils.

Teaching approaches used by the team were varied: tutorials, games, quizzes, activities, simulations and group discussions. At the end of the programme the students were

each given a project to undertake which required them to disseminate their 'new' knowledge around dementia to younger members of the school. This was done either through school assemblies or in small group classroom sessions.

At the time of writing the dementia awareness training had been given to approximately 200 young people and the school's dementia champions and friends continue to cascade their knowledge across their schools. Feedback from students has been extremely positive. "I found it helpful to listen to someone with dementia and how they get on with life," said one, while another said "I would like to meet more people with dementia." ■

References

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Public Educator of the Year by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in November 2012. Our project was undertaken in part of Shropshire but we suspect the limited awareness of dementia among our schoolchildren could reflect a nationwide problem. Dementia care practitioners, having had the training and experience in dementia education and management, can tackle the poor levels of public awareness through wide-ranging awareness-raising campaigns.

Our future plans

We have created a website named 'The DARE Project: Explaining dementia to young people' (<http://dareproject.co.uk>). It gives facts on dementia

as well as describing people's experiences with this condition. We are in the process of creating dementia quizzes such that students can download certificates on their completion. Our website also carries information about the problems that people with dementia and their carers can face as well as the support that they are entitled to receive.

The DARE project has helped to build up an understanding of dementia in three schools in Telford and Wrekin. Through our links with the Alzheimer's Society, our NHS Trust, and Public Education Committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (of which Dr Nazir is a member) we aim to promote it in more schools across

Shropshire from March this year. We will act on the feedback already received, as well as present schools with toolkits containing downloadable resources for educational purposes. Moreover, our developing website should enable students from other parts of the UK to make use of the project in order to increase their awareness of dementia. ■

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